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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004741

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: THIRTY-METER SEWAGE WATERFALL AND OTHER CONCERNS

Classified By: Economic Counselor William Weinstein, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Consulate General Jerusalem cleared this message.

¶1. (C) Summary: Israeli infrastructure and environment officials told NEA Senior S&T Advisor Charles Lawson that they remain concerned about neglect of sewage and other waste on the West Bank. Increasing damage to the Mountain Aquifer shared by Israelis and Palestinians is epitomized by a thirty-meter sewage waterfall near the Dead Sea fed by ten million cubic meters of untreated sewage from East Jerusalem, Maaleh Adummim, Abu Dis and Bethlehem. Israeli officials and environmentalists are urging the U.S. to join other donors to carry out waste treatment projects in the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli Water Commission and Civil Administration are facilitating local West Bank water projects and the Israeli water company Mekorot has increased its supply of water to Palestinian areas by ten percent. The GOI Infrastructure Ministry is working to increase electricity supplies to Gaza. End summary.

¶2. (C) NEA Senior S&T Advisor Charles Lawson visited Israel for a series of meetings November 5-8 with GOI officials and other parties to discuss a variety of issues related to water, environment and regional cooperation. The Acting Water Commission, the Director General of the Infrastructure Ministry, Civilian Administration officers and the Minister of Environment expressed strong concern about the deterioration of the Mountain Aquifer, which underlies the West Bank and parts of Israel and provides water to both Israelis and Palestinians. Water Commission officials said that the number of illegal wells on the West Bank is increasing; some of these are shallow wells and drilling is difficult to detect. The military attorney representing the Civil Administration stated that action would be taken soon against Palestinians who were drilling wells illegally. (Note: The issue of illegal wells is not a new one. It has been discussed in the Joint Water Committee for years. Prior to the second intifada, there were joint Palestinian-Israeli efforts to address the issue of illegal drilling. The Israeli concern now is that the number of illegal wells seems to be increasing, and the Palestinian Authority does not have the wherewithal to deal with the problem. End note). Water Commission officials reported finding increased contamination of existing water sources due to untreated sewage and other wastes.

¶3. (C) A senior Israeli environmental attorney in private practice described a thirty-meter sewage water fall near the Dead Sea south of Qumran. Untreated sewage flows into Wadi Kidron from East Jerusalem, Abu Dis, Bethlehem, the Israeli settlement of Maaleh Adummim and surrounding areas at a rate of ten million cubic meters (MCM) per year. The majority of the sewage comes from Israeli-controlled areas; three to four MCM's comes from Palestinian jurisdictions. Options for handling the untreated sewage include: a joint treatment facility near Abu Dis; an Israeli facility in or near East

Jerusalem or treatment not far from the Dead Sea; or treatment by the Palestinian Water Authority or local Palestinian jurisdictions with the treated wastewater made available for Palestinian agricultural use. All of these options present challenges for one or both sides, and donor or other funding is not currently in place. Consequently, no concrete plans currently exist for handling the uncontrolled sewage flow. GOI officials, while preferring the joint Israeli-Palestinian option, are not optimistic that it is feasible in the current political climate and are, thus, seriously considering the Israel-only option.

14. (C/NF) GOI officials repeatedly urged that the USG become re-involved in major water and sewage projects for the Palestinians. The Civil Administration infrastructure officer went so far as to say that Hamas was a reality and was not going to go away and the U.S. and Israel should work with a Hamas government on such projects (representing his personal view and not an official GOI position; please protect comment). The Environment Ministry and Water and Infrastructure officials noted that the Germans, other countries and the World Bank were moving forward on waste water treatment projects in both the West Bank and Gaza, with the Germans already having begun work in Salfit.

15. (C) In the meantime, the Israeli Water Commission is working with the Palestinian Water Authority to effect small-scale water supply projects in the West Bank. So far in 2006, the Israeli water company, Mekorot, increased its supply of water to Palestinian communities on the West Bank by four MCM's, or ten percent, according to Water Commission officials. Infrastructure Ministry officials confirmed press reports that Israel is completing a new high-voltage power line, using Palestinian clearance revenues, to increase

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electricity supplies to Gaza.

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JONES